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TAGS: [ICTY](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: SERBIA STEPS UP WAR CRIMES COOPERATION

Classified by Ambassador Michael Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (c) SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION: The formal constitution of Serbia's new "National Security Council (NSC)" on May 31 -- led by President Tadic and designed to conduct full ICTY cooperation -- combined with the arrest of a top former aide to PIFWC Ratko Mladic, steps up significantly the new government's efforts to cooperate on war crimes. Whatever the circumstances or motivation for this arrest, it is a positive development. This is the first arrest of a senior PIFWC, and a departure from the "voluntary surrender" model of Kostunica. It is also the first solid Serbian MUP activity we have seen, and a positive reflection on the commitment of DSS VP and Interior Minister Dragan Jovic to take action on PIFWC issues. Combined with the formation of the new NSC, this action will undoubtedly lead to the restart of SAA talks and a positive assessment by Carla del Ponte. Even without the key result of a Mladic apprehension, we believe it justifiable to propose to the Secretary that she now certify Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY,

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timed to coincide with a similar determination by the EU Commission regarding the SAA. Meanwhile we plan to maintain private and public pressure that Mladic remains a condition for ultimate success in Serbia's Euro-Atlantic quest. End Summary and Recommendation.

¶2. (c) ICTY Action Plan Coordinator Rasim Ljajic confirmed to emboffs the evening of May 31 that General Zdravko Tolimir, a senior PIFWC and key aide to Ratko Mladic, was arrested following a joint RS-Serbian MUP operation on the RS-Serbian border. The arrest was front-page news in virtually all Belgrade press on June 1, and so far there has been little or no negative reaction from the Radicals or Socialists -- though it is still very early in the news cycle. Ljajic subsequently confirmed that Tolimir was arrested on the RS side of the border and remains in custody in RS, and that the plan is for him to be flown directly to The Hague from Banja Luka. Ljajic added that Tolimir has suffered recently from multiple heart attacks and possibly an aneurism, hinting that health concerns may have played a (undefined) role in his arrest.

¶3. (c) The arrest comes just days before a planned visit to Belgrade by ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte to assess Serbia's cooperation with the tribunal, and on the eve of an anticipated announcement by EU enlargement commissioner Ollie Rehn that SAA talks with Serbia will be restarted. It also comes on the heels of the announcement by the GoS of the formation of a National Security Council, headed by the president and including the PM, ministers of justice, interior, and defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and the heads of key intelligence services. The arrest and the formation of the NSC have led to widespread speculation that both the SAA restart will happen and that del Ponte will assess Serbia's cooperation favorably. It has also led to some speculation that Mladic's apprehension may now be easier, as Tolimir was a close confidante and was believed to have orchestrated the formation of Mladic's support network.

¶4. (c) The timing of this arrest did not pass unnoticed by

Belgrade's jaded analytical community and International Community contacts, some of whom point to it as evidence that the government is able to bring in senior PIFWCs when it is politically advantageous to do so. One of the more cynical observers, LDP president Cedomir Jovanovic, dismissed this as the GoS pulling Tolimir out of its "PIFWC Pantry." Others, though, point out that the joint MUP operation was a legitimate one, highlighted cooperation between the RS and Serbia, and came as a surprise to many in the government itself - Ljajic told us Kostunica's chief of staff, Aleksander Nikitovic, was out of the loop on the operation and had to call Ljajic for details. Meanwhile, chief War Crimes prosecutor Vladimir Vukcevic told RLA June 1 that additional arrests are in the works. We suspect most likely these would be Goran Hadzic and/or Stojan Zupljanin - the latter has been rumored to be close to being apprehended for some weeks now.

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